

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY COHESION POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

10 DECEMBER 2024

Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls: Progress, Proposals, and Pathways Forward

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Housing and Community Cohesion Policy Advisory Committee	10 December 2024
Cabinet (Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Safety)	18 December 2024

Will this be a Key Decision?	No
Urgency	Urgent for Policy Advisory Committee Following a motion at Full Council it has been agreed to bring an urgent update to allow members the opportunity to discuss reducing violence against women and girls.
Final Decision-Maker	Cabinet
Lead Director	Angela Woodhouse, Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Lead Officer and Report Author	Martyn Jeynes, Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

A motion was brought to Council to ask for the introduction of additional tools to reduce violence against women and girls. This report outlines the work undertaken to date by the Safer Maidstone Partnership to reduce Violence Against Women and Girls in the borough. It also considers the suggested actions of the motion brought to full Council and sets out how the Council could look to incorporate them and the processes that would be needed. This is a high-level report, highlighting that the importance of this works requires further research to ensure sustainable and meaningful introductions of the proposed measures.

Purpose of Report
Decision

This report asks the Committee to consider the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. To note the work undertaken to date in relation to reducing violence against women and girls through the Safer Maidstone Partnership;
2. Progress the actions as set out in section 4 ensuring the appropriate stakeholders can be engaged and the actions implemented appropriately; and
3. That a further report is provided to Crime and Disorder OSC in April 2025 to provide an update on the progress made for each action, alongside the new Community Safety Partnership Plan, which will outline how violence against women and girls has been incorporated into the 2025-2028 Partnership Plan.

Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls: Progress, Proposals, and Pathways Forward

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure ○ Safe, Clean and Green ○ Homes and Communities ○ A Thriving Place <p>Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve the Safe, Clean and Green objective.</p>	Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Heritage is Respected ○ Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced ○ Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved ○ Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is Respected <p>The report recommendations support the achievement of the cross-cutting objectives.</p>	Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager
Risk Management	Covered in the risk section of the report.	Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager
Financial	Some of the actions may have financial implications and these will be identified as decisions are made. For example, there is a small annual fee for white ribbon accreditation	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and will allow the appropriate PAC to hear whether staffing implications are required.	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Legal	Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers as set out in the report. It will also meet the council's duty under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 2017.	Mid-Kent Legal Services
Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact personal information the Council processes.	Information Governance Team

Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service, therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment. However, further reports to the appropriate PACs may offer more specific guidance on this for each action.	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager
Crime and Disorder	Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers as set out in the report. It will also meet the council's duty under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 2017.	Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager
Procurement	No implications identified.	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Biodiversity and Climate Change	There are no implications on biodiversity and climate change.	Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 A motion, as set out in Appendix 1, was brought to full council by Cllr Jenkins-Baldock to ask that Maidstone Borough Council look to introduce a range of tools to reduce violence against women and girls in the borough. The motion has been referred to Housing and Community Cohesion Policy Advisory Committee (HCC PAC) for consideration prior to Cabinet on 18 December. The motion sets out the following actions:

1. **Developing a Broader VAWG Strategy:**

The Council will work towards developing a comprehensive strategy to tackle violence against women and girls, including the introduction of public awareness campaigns and bystander training to challenge problematic behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs. This strategy will outline concrete steps to increase the safety of women and girls in Maidstone, with a particular focus on vulnerable populations.

2. **Promoting a Women's Night-Time Safety Charter:**

The Council will support and promote a Women's Night-Time Safety Charter to improve the safety of women in public spaces after dark. This includes working with local businesses, especially bars, pubs, and taxi services, to commit to safer practices, including better training for

staff and drivers to ensure women's safety.

3. Leveraging Licensing Tools:

We propose to explore the use of licensing tools, including taxi and bar/pub licensing, to enhance the safety of women and girls in the borough. This includes implementing additional measures such as improved driver safety checks, the introduction of clear signage in taxis, and ensuring safe transportation options are readily available for women at night.

4. Making Women's Safety Central to Town Planning:

The safety of women and girls will be incorporated into all town planning and development discussions, ensuring that public spaces are designed with safety in mind. This includes improved lighting, more accessible public transport routes, and the creation of safe public spaces that encourage women to feel comfortable and secure in all areas of the borough.

5. Achieving White Ribbon Accreditation:

Maidstone Borough Council will work towards becoming a White Ribbon Accredited Organisation. White Ribbon UK promotes the idea of men and boys working to end violence against women. This accreditation will demonstrate our commitment to tackling violence and abuse and fostering an inclusive culture of respect and equality in the community.

2.2 Violence against women and girls remains a critical issue, deeply rooted in societal gender-based challenges. Recent improvements, driven by increased awareness of domestic abuse, highlight the need for comprehensive strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored this urgency, bringing domestic abuse into sharper focus.

2.3 The tragic murders of Sarah Everard from South London and PCSO Julia James from Folkestone have had a profound impact on public consciousness and policy. Sarah Everard's murder by a serving police officer in March 2021 and Julia James' murder in April 2021 while walking her dog in Snowdown, Kent, underscored the pervasive nature of violence against women and girls. These cases, among many others, have catalysed a seismic shift in processes and strategies to address this issue.

2.4 **The national picture:** The national approach to tackling violence against women and girls involves a comprehensive strategy that includes prevention, support for survivors, pursuit of perpetrators, and creating a stronger system. The UK Government and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) prioritise building trust and confidence, relentless perpetrator pursuit, and creating safer spaces

2.5 **The Kent Picture:** The Kent Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) has a dedicated strategy that aligns with the national framework. This strategy includes:

1. **Holding Offenders Accountable:** Specialised teams focus on investigating and prosecuting violence against women and girls-related crimes.
2. **Supporting Victims:** Initiatives like the Sexual Offences Liaison Officers (SOLOs) ensure victims receive comprehensive support throughout the criminal justice process.
3. **Community Engagement:** Programs like the "Ask Angela" campaign and public engagement forums help build trust and ensure community involvement in safety initiatives.

Maidstone's Data led approach

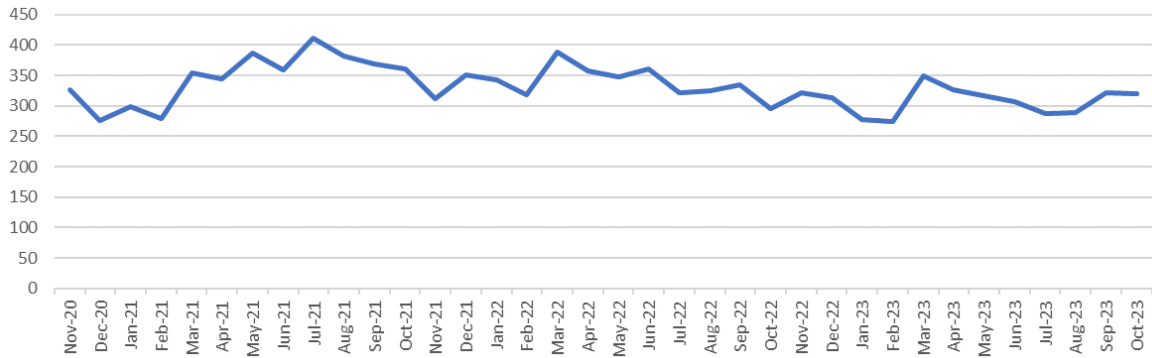
2.6 Community Safety data is collated from across the partnership to undertake an annual strategic assessment. As detailed in the motion, violence against women and girls crimes are often underreported for several reasons. Many victims fear not being believed or taken seriously by authorities, while societal stigma and shame can deter them from coming forward. A lack of trust in the criminal justice system and fear of retaliation also play significant roles. Additionally, some forms of violence, like harassment or non-physical abuse, are so normalised that victims may not recognise them as crimes. When analysing data, the Safer Maidstone Partnership and the Maidstone Domestic Abuse Forum are very conscious of this fact.

2.7 At the time of publishing this report, the data for 2024 has not been released. The updated information will be published and shared with the Crime and Disorder OSC in April 2025 as per the recommendation in this report.

2.8 From the data available at the time of publication:

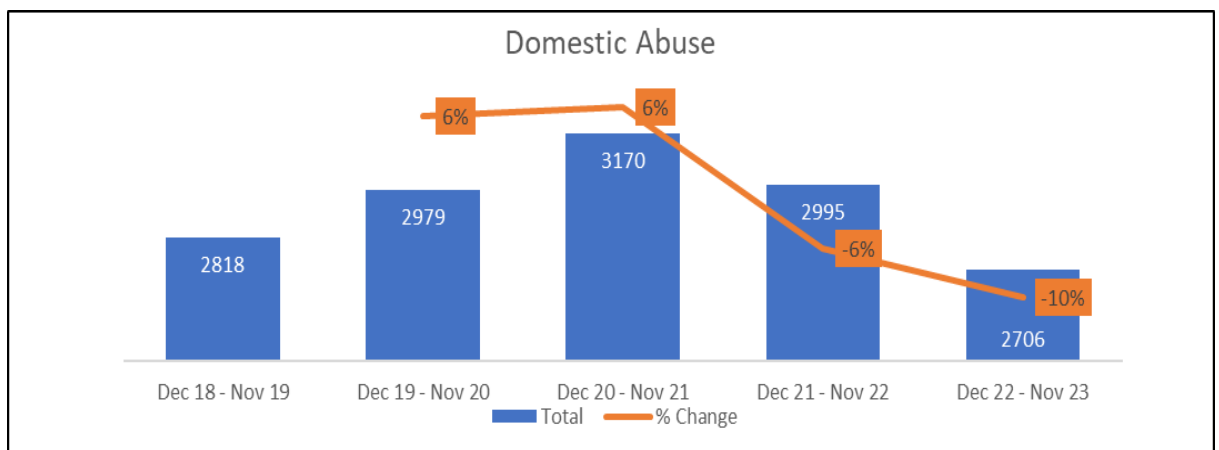
Violence Against Women and Girls Reports:

- The number of incidents between November 2022 to October 2023 was 3,703, a 9% reduction from the previous year (4,053)
- Data from October 2023 showed a gradual decrease in reported crimes over the previous three years. Maidstone ranks the 3rd highest in Kent by volume but only the 6th highest in Kent once the population data is used to normalise the data.



Domestic Abuse

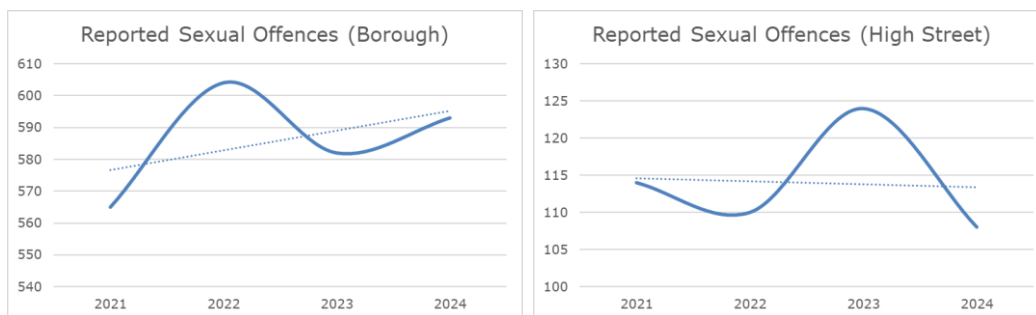
- The data for 2023 shows a decrease of 10% of all crimes recorded as Domestic Abuse, with reported levels dropping to levels closer to those seen pre-pandemic.



- As with the previous data set Maidstone ranks the 3rd highest in Kent by volume but only 5th highest in Kent once the population data is used to normalise the data.
- In 2023, **18%** of all crime in Maidstone Borough is related to Domestic Abuse (where parties are connected to each other) and this equates to **38%** of all violent crime.

Sexual Offences:

- Data from Kent Police shows an increase in reported sexual offences, though still lower than in 2022. This data is not gender specific, but sexual offences are disproportionately high in women. Note that 2021 data was impacted by Covid restrictions. This data also includes domestic violence between intimate partners.
- Comparative data for the High Street Ward shows a slight decreasing trend, despite fluctuations.



- Policing areas of Fant (YA12), Heath (YA14), Park Wood (YA36), and Shepway North (YA34) all averaged more than 30 reports a year since 2021, which behind High Street (YA11) are the highest in the borough.
- In 2023, 55 offenders were charged/summonsed, a 67% increase from the previous year.

Spiking Reports:

- Data obtained from the Kent Police Licensing team shows recent reports of spiking in the borough:
 - May to November 2023: 35 reports
 - May to November 2024: 19 reports
- Notably, no sexual assaults were reported in any of these cases, there is no discernible link between offences, no suspects were identified, and venue CCTV is often unable to determine when the offences happened.
- There have been two reports of spiking involving needles, although there are evidential concerns about one of them.
- Concerns over "several" spiking incidents at one venue, one evening was investigated and was unfortunately unsubstantiated, although a viral video about the incident has helped raise awareness of national incidents. The venue in question is continuing to work with Kent Police licensing.

Voice of women:

- Community safety surveys consistently highlight gender-based concerns, with women reporting higher levels of fear and perceived risk of crime compared to men. Academic research shows that this heightened fear is often linked to the risk of sexual assault and broader societal issues, such as gender-based violence and harassment. These differences are not solely based on actual victimisation rates but are influenced by socialisation processes and perceived vulnerabilities. Therefore, it is crucial to consider these gender-based concerns when analysing survey results to ensure that safety measures and interventions address the specific needs and experiences of both women and men.
- A Community Safety Survey undertaken in 2021 showed that female respondents, in comparison to male, that:

- They felt crime had increase more significantly in the previous three years.
 - They felt that domestic abuse is a significant issue.
 - They felt Less safe in the daytime and significantly less safe at night, both locally and in the Town Centre.
 - That less had been a victim of a crime.
 - They felt that ASB and young people hanging around had increased significantly.
- The Community Safety Survey 2024 was completed earlier this year, and the results are being finalised as part of the Community Safety Partnership Plan process and will be published in the new year. From the draft results, the gender-based results show no significant change from the 2021 survey.

Reducing Violence against women and girls through collaboration

2.9 The Safer Maidstone Partnership has been actively working to reduce violence against women and girls through numerous initiatives through more than a decade of work in this area.

2.10 The Safer Maidstone Partnership (SMP) is the name for our statutory Community Safety Partnership and is co-chaired by the Police District Commander and Maidstone's Chief Executive. The SMP is a collaborative initiative involving Maidstone Borough Council, Kent Police, and various statutory and non-statutory partners. The primary role of the SMP is to enhance community safety through a multi-agency approach, addressing a wide range of issues such as serious organised crime, domestic abuse, and youth safety.

2.11 By bringing together different organisations and resources, the SMP aims to create a safer environment for all residents of Maidstone. The partnership focuses on prevention, intervention, and support, ensuring that community safety strategies are comprehensive and effective. The work of the SMP is delivered through a Community Safety Partnership Plan, which is updated every 3 years and reviewed annually.

2.12 The current Partnership plan ([Maidstone Community Safety Partnership Plan 2022-2025 - Maidstone Borough Council](#), available at www.maidstone.gov.uk) sets out four priority work streams, each of which have elements where the SMP works to reduce violence against women and girls:

- **Tackling Serious Violent Crime:** This priority addresses issues such as gang violence and knife crime, which can both directly and indirectly impact women and girls. It also considers modern day slavery, including the role of women in brothels and slave labour.
- **Reducing the Harm Caused by Domestic Abuse:** Efforts in this area directly address violence in intimate relationships, where women are disproportionately affected.

- **Keeping Children and Young People Safe:** This involves addressing risks such as sexual exploitation and grooming, which predominantly impact girls. It also looks to support young people in forming meaningful relationships, promoting the role of boys in reducing violence and the development of safe spaces.
- **Providing a Safe Town Centre:** Measures under this priority aim to prevent predatory behaviour in public spaces, enhancing the safety of women and girls in both the daytime and the night-time economy.

2.13 The ongoing efforts of the Safer Maidstone Partnership are delivered through several Multi-Agency Working Groups. Some of these groups are listed below:

- **SMP Exec Board:** representatives from statutory member agencies collaborate to set the agenda for future SMP meetings and plan services and programmes in line with the targets and objectives of the SMP's Community Safety Partnership Plan.
- **Safer Maidstone Partnership meeting:** a quarterly forum for information sharing on current initiatives, with updates from the SMP Priority Subgroups. These meetings also include a standing item to discuss the learning from Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews, formerly known as Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs).
- **Serious Organised Crime Panel:** Includes police tactical reports and offender management, including prison releases.
- **Neighbourhood Task Force:** Assesses local intelligence and delivers operations using a tactical problem-solving model, such as high-profile patrols in Mote Park to tackle accostings, following an increase in reports over the summer.
- **District Contextual Safeguarding Meeting:** Focuses on young people and those at risk, including young people who go missing or are exposed to sexual predators and grooming.
- **Town Centre Task Force:** Strategic and operational meetings addressing a range of community safety issues in the town, including the delivery of Safer Streets 4.

2.14 The SMP recognises that this is an area that still requires continued efforts and the following is provided to provide reassurance that this is an area that is part of the SMP's plans.

2.15 In 2022, the SMP, through the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, successfully secured £565,877. This funding was allocated to a broad spectrum of initiatives aimed at reducing violence against women and girls and Anti-Social Behaviour.

2.16 Details of the initiatives delivered through Safer Streets 4 are provided in appendix 2. A summary of how the initiatives contribute to reducing violence against women and girls is provided below.

Safer Streets 4 Initiatives:

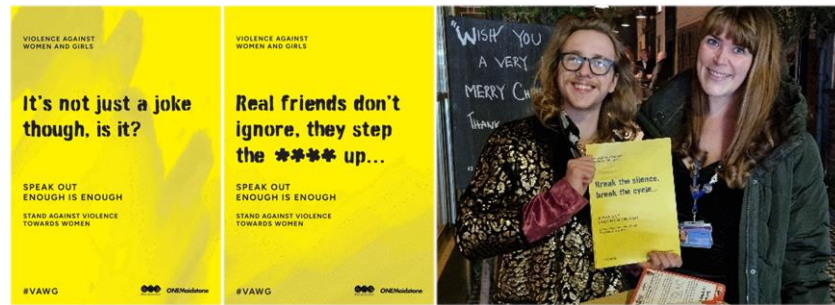
- **Safer Streets Project Manager and Business Initiatives:** This role improved safety practices in the night-time economy and increased community vigilance, directly contributing to reducing violence against women and girls.
- **Conversion of Disused Toilet Block into a Community Safety Hub:** The hub enhances visibility and guardianship in the park, providing a safer environment for women and girls and supporting community safety efforts. This complements the increased CCTV, nighttime closures and the work undertaken to change the narrative of this beautiful town park.
- **Summer Warden for Brenchley Gardens:** The presence of a warden increased safety in public spaces, deterring potential offenders and providing reassurance to women and girls using the gardens, particularly during events.
- **Active Bystander Training and Coordinator:** This training equips individuals with the skills to safely intervene in situations of potential violence, promoting a community-wide approach to preventing violence against women and girls.
- **Enhancing Shop Fronts and Community Locations:** Improvements to the physical environment make public spaces feel safer and safer by being less attractive to potential offenders.
- **Tackling Youth Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in the Town:** Addressing youth ASB helps to create a safer environment for everyone, including women and girls, by reducing the likelihood of harassment and other forms of violence within peer groups and from older persons who target vulnerable young ladies and girls.
- **Best Bar None (Safer Socialising NTE Scheme) Including Awards Evening:** This accreditation scheme encourages night-time economy venues to adopt best practices for safety, reducing the risk of violence against women and girls in these settings. A specific assessment category looked at the measure's venues had in place to reduce violence against women and girls. 9 venues were accredited.
- **"Maidsafer" Safer Streets Public Education and Awareness Campaign:** This campaign raises awareness about violence against women and girls, educating the public and promoting safer behaviours through advertising and digital media. It included a "takeover" of the KM Online advertising space with the governments national "Enough" campaign.
- **Control Tools (Merchandise and Materials):** Distribution of personal safety tools, such as alarms and drink cover scrunchies, helps women and girls protect themselves from potential violence.

- **Supporting Night-Time Economy (NTE) Volunteers:** Volunteers like Urban Blue and Street Pastors provide support and assistance in the night-time economy, enhancing safety for women and girls. The funding supported training more volunteers and purchasing equipment such as flip flops, for women to wear when they needed more comfortable footwear to get home safely
- **Hollie Guard App (Paid Option Vouchers):** Providing access to the enhanced version of the Hollie Guard app offers women and girls a tool for personal safety, including features like location tracking and emergency alerts. These are administered through the Maidstone DA Forum.
- **Improved Public Realm and Mobile CCTV Across the Town Centre:** Enhancements to the public realm and the deployment of mobile CCTV increase surveillance and deter potential offenders, making public spaces safer for women and girls. These included mobile CCTV which has been used to monitor Brewer Street Cemetery and Mote Road due to concerns around predatory behaviour.

2.17 The initial funding was spent between April 2022 and September 2023, but a requirement of the funding was that the initiatives were sustainable and created a continued legacy. Whilst the Safer Streets 4 funding allowed for an enhanced period of focus, work across the partnership has continued to support efforts to reduce violence against women and girls.

2.18 Examples of these activities include:

- **Violence Against Women and Girls Walks and Talks:** These events engage the female community directly. By discussing safety concerns and sharing information on available resources, these initiatives help to create a safer environment and empower women and girls to help us understand their concerns. Additional walks have been hosted for LGBTQ+ and Visually Impaired communities. The next Walk and Talk is planned for evening of 12th December to engage with women during the busy Christmas Period.
- **"Unstoppable Girls" Sessions at 326:** These weekly sessions provide a safe space for young women, with confirmed or suspected ADHD, to discuss their experiences and learn about self-empowerment and safety. These sessions focus on building confidence, self-esteem, and resilience, reducing the risk of violence and promoting a supportive community for girls who may be more vulnerable due to their ADHD.
- **An "Edgy" Poster Campaign:** A new poster campaign, developed with One Maidstone has introduced some posters that challenge unwanted behaviour. The posters which were distributed to 10 venues in the Town Centre. For adult only venues, the posters include profanity to draw the reader's attention. Pictures show examples of posters and a Community Protection Officer with one of the venues who are displaying them.



- **Further Active Bystander Training:** 60 Rail Enforcement Officers from Southeast Rail and 40 People on the Prevent and Organised Crime Week of Action received bespoke training to help their response and prevention of violence against women and girls, other violence and ASB.
- **Modern slavery interventions:** Investigations into local brothels have led to the safeguarding of women who may be victims of exploitation. These efforts ensure that vulnerable women receive the support and protection they need, addressing a critical aspect of violence against women and girls.
- **Op Vigilant:** Operation Vigilant involves police and Community Protection Team officers been deployed “plain clothed” into an area to identify predatory behaviour and vulnerability in public spaces. Working alongside uniform officers, who undertake the interventions, this proactive approach helps to deter potential offenders and raises awareness protect women and girls from violence and harassment.
- **Additional CCTV:** The installation of additional CCTV cameras in North Week Street enhances surveillance and deters potential offenders. Camera improvements are also planned for Jubilee Square. An application has been made by to Kent Police to also provide a mobile tower camera which can be deployed for events and in locations such as the river walk, to improve safety.

2.19 Domestic abuse (DA) is a specific area of violence against women and girls that is prominently reflected as a priority by the SMP. Recognising the profound impact of domestic abuse on individuals and communities, the SMP has dedicated significant resources and efforts to address this issue.

2.20 The Maidstone Domestic Abuse Forum (MDAF) works across the partnership and links with the Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (KIDAS) to deliver various activities and services supporting victims of abuse and raising awareness. Here are some of the activities undertaken in 2023:

- **Hosted Domestic Abuse & Wellbeing Network Event:** In September, the Forum held a large-scale event at the Hazlitt Theatre, featuring guest speakers and survivor accounts. This event, aimed at professionals and the public, will now be annual.
- **Supported Key Projects Consultations:** The Forum supported consultations on the Kent & Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy and the SAFER scheme, with active participation in the procurement panel.

- **Improved Local Service Provision:** Outreach services have increased, with new drop-in sessions in High Street and Park Wood wards, providing safe spaces for those affected by domestic abuse.
- **Improving Data Analysis:** The Forum focused on data to enhance local strategies, identifying service gaps, and engaging with organisations to address these needs.
- **“Reframe for Resilience” Events:** Delivered multi-agency conferences on trauma awareness and domestic abuse to professionals.
- **Assessed Local S208 Submissions:** Supported those fleeing domestic abuse and placed in Maidstone, providing financial aid, and designing welcome packs with essential information.
- **Updated MDAF Support Directory:** Established a virtual directory for real-time updates to meet evolving service needs.
- **Increased Collaboration:** Welcomed new attendees from various agencies, including Kent Police and stalking specialists, and partnered with Nationwide bank for the Safe Space initiative.
- **Enhanced Communications:** Designed new One Stop Shop posters and business cards with QR codes for discreet support, and actively participated in the 16 Days of Action campaign.
- **Increased Suicide Awareness and Shared Domestic Homicide Review Findings:** Reviewed DHRs with a focus on suicide and domestic abuse, sharing findings to enhance organisational skills and knowledge.

2.21 We are currently working towards Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation, which we aim to complete by March 2025. Achieving DAHA accreditation means that as a local authority and housing provider, we will be recognised for delivering safe and effective responses to domestic abuse. This accreditation involves meeting rigorous standards across eight priority areas, ensuring that our operations and interventions are designed to support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. It will enhance our ability to provide comprehensive support to those affected by domestic abuse, improve staff training and awareness, and strengthen our partnerships with local domestic abuse services.

2.22 Additionally, we have introduced a new Domestic Abuse Policy to support our own staff. This policy aims to provide a safe and supportive workplace environment for employees who may be experiencing domestic abuse, ensuring they have access to the necessary resources and support.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Cabinet may decide to ask officers to progress the actions outlined in the motion. It is recommended that these actions are progressed via reports to the relevant Committees including Licensing and the Policy Advisory

- Committees and Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Committee, some have budget and policy implications so these will need to be set out
- 3.2 Cabinet may decide to reject the actions. This is not recommended as it may be possible, upon further research, to implement some, if not all the actions once the proper processes are considered.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1- Acknowledge SMP's Efforts to date

- 4.1 This recommendation asks that Cabinet formally acknowledges the extensive efforts and the creative initiatives already implemented by the Safer Maidstone Partnership to reduce violence against women and girls. This includes the public awareness campaigns, training programs, enhanced safety measures, and multi-agency collaborations. Given the importance of this field and the extensive continued efforts, accepting this recommendation will mean:
- Recognition of the progress made and the impact of current initiatives.
 - Increased awareness among stakeholders and the community about the ongoing efforts to tackle violence against women and girls.
 - Recognises the foundation for building future strategies and actions based on the successes and lessons learned from current initiatives.
- 4.2 Acknowledging the work undertaken to date is crucial for maintaining momentum and ensuring that the efforts of the SMP are recognised and supported. It provides a clear record of progress and sets the stage for future actions, demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement and accountability.

Recommendation 2: Progress Actions

- 4.3 Initial conversations, with the appropriate service leads, provides an update on each action and way forward to progress the action:
- **Developing a Broader Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy:**
 - Developing a broader strategy to tackle violence against women and girls requires a collaborative approach to ensure the right response and effective implementation. The Council will work towards creating a comprehensive strategy that includes public awareness campaigns and bystander training to challenge problematic behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs. This strategy will outline concrete steps to increase the safety of women and girls in Maidstone, with a particular focus on vulnerable populations.
 - The need for collaboration is paramount in providing an effective response to violence against women and girls, the Council works with partners through the Safer Maidstone Partnership. The SMP plays a crucial role in this effort, bringing together various stakeholders, including the Council, Kent Police, and other statutory and non-

statutory partners. By leveraging the strengths and resources of each partner, the SMP can ensure that the strategy is well-rounded and addresses the multifaceted nature of violence against women and girls.

- Violence against women and girls was discussed at a recent stakeholder event where partners present felt that consideration should be given to making violence against women and girls a crosscutting theme. This is because violence against women and girls interacts with the existing priorities of the Community Safety Partnership Plan, such as tackling serious violent crime, reducing the harm caused by domestic abuse, keeping children and young people safe, and providing a safe town centre. By integrating violence against women and girls as a crosscutting theme, the strategy can ensure that all related initiatives are aligned and mutually reinforcing, leading to more effective outcomes in reducing violence against women and girls.
- **Recommended Action-** *The Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Safety, on behalf of the Cabinet, request that the Safer Maidstone Partnership give greater focus to reducing Violence Against Women and Girls for the new plan for 2025-2028 with appropriate actions*
- **Promoting a Women's Night-Time Safety Charter:**
 - The Safer Maidstone Partnership, through Best Bar None and other Night Time Economy (NTE) Initiatives has actively sought to engage NTE Businesses in helping to actively promote safety for women and to change the narrative around Maidstone's NTE. However, since the Safer Street Funding finished, sustaining the level of engagement with businesses and Best Bar None has been challenging, so resourcing will be a consideration.
 - Violence against women and girls is an issue, we anticipate all businesses recognising, it is important to acknowledge the financial challenges that many businesses are facing post-pandemic. Requiring businesses to make changes or invest in staff training will necessitate incentives to encourage participation.
 - **Recommended Action-** *Officers be ask to collaborate with businesses, One Maidstone, and the police to develop a Night-Time Safety Charter and toolkit for Maidstone, this will be reported to the Policy Advisory Committee and Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Safety for approval in 2025/2026.*
- **Leveraging Licensing Tools:**
 - Our Hackney & Private Hire Licensing Policy reflects the great importance placed on keeping vulnerable members of our community, including women and girls, safe whilst using these services. The Policy is reviewed regularly, and the Cabinet may want to consider making a referral to the Licensing Committee to explore whether the measures highlighted as in use by Greater Manchester CC are not already replicated in MBC's policy, and/or whether it would

be appropriate to incorporate additional measures following the required consultation and adoption process.

- **Recommended Action-** *Cabinet refer this matter to the Licensing Committee to review and make changes as appropriate.*
- **Making Women's Safety Central to Town Planning**
 - Public safety and the perception of the risk of crime are material planning considerations and so must be considered (where applicable) in the determination of planning applications.
 - Design guidance seeks to avoid un-surveyed communal areas such as open space are overlooked by having habitable room windows fronting such areas providing natural surveillance. Increasingly, courtyard parking areas are avoided rather parking space is provided as part of the public highway where there is lighting both passive and street columns and, again, natural surveillance.
 - Well-lit and short walking routes with natural surveillance is another key design consideration as is locating sensitive uses carefully such as in a central area.
 - **Recommended Action-** *Officers be asked to bring a report to Cabinet via the Planning and Healthier Stronger Communities Policy Advisory Committee, setting out options for taking this forward which could include producing guidance for planners, developers, and architects to take a gender informed approach to planning for the new Local Plan. Examples of this include the Greater London Authority.*
- **Achieving White Ribbon Accreditation**
 - The Council has previously explored White Ribbon Campaign accreditation, MBC has actively participated in White Ribbon awareness events and the Kent-wide 16 Days of Action campaign, which begins on White Ribbon Day each year.
 - Achieving White Ribbon accreditation would highlight our commitment to an intersectional approach, recognising the responsibility of men and boys in reducing violence against women and girls. Internal Domestic Abuse champions are well-placed to support the strategic plan and deliver actions, but increased involvement from male staff across all directorates is necessary.
 - We are currently pursuing Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation, which covers many themes related to violence against women and girls and ensures robust procedures, policies, and awareness. Given the ongoing work with DAHA, it is suggested to complete this first, with a proposed completion date of March 2025, to allocate time and resources effectively.
 - **Recommended Action-** *White Ribbon accreditation to be pursued in 2025/2026 via a report Cabinet via Housing and Community Cohesion Policy Advisory Committee and setting out actions and budget implications.*

- 4.4 Preparing detailed reports and engaging advisory committees ensures that the proposed actions are thoroughly vetted and supported by those who will be involved in their implementation. This collaborative approach increases the likelihood of successful and sustainable outcomes, as it leverages the expertise and resources of various stakeholders.

Recommendation 3- Progress Update Report for April 2025

- 4.5 This recommendation involves preparing a comprehensive report for the Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) in April 2025. The report will provide updates on the progress of each action and detail how violence against women and girls has been integrated into the new Community Safety Partnership Plan for 2025-2028, which will be brought to the same meeting for approval.
- 4.6 Providing a detailed progress report to the Crime and Disorder OSC ensures ongoing accountability and transparency. It allows for the assessment of progress across each policy advisory committee without undermining their processes. It also ensures that the collaborative nature of this work is sustained and remains integral to the new Community Safety Partnership Plan.
- 4.7 By following these recommendations, the council can ensure that the actions to reduce violence against women and girls are well-planned, supported, and effectively implemented, leading to sustainable improvements in community safety.

5. RISK

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated with the recommended approach are within the Council's risk appetite.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 The report includes details of the public Community Safety Survey undertaken in 2021 and draft details from the 2024 survey which will be published in 2025.
- 6.2 The relevant PAC will need to consider the need for further consultation on the proposed actions as necessary.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 With the first recommendation, the leader of the council could consider writing to the co-chairs of the Safer Maidstone Partnership to formally acknowledge and thank the partnership for their continued efforts. This letter could highlight the achievements and initiatives undertaken by the SMP and

express the council's gratitude for their dedication to reducing violence against women and girls. The letter could then be shared through the Council's official channels to ensure the community is aware of the SMP's valuable contributions.

- 7.2 To engage the relevant advisory committees, the portfolio holders for licensing, planning, housing, and community safety should engage the appropriate officers to prepare Policy Advisory Committee reports on the actions for their areas. Formal notifications will be sent to the chairs of these committees, outlining the scope and importance of the proposed actions.
- 7.3 To ensure delivery of the April 2025 progress report, the lead officer for this report will be responsible for both the Community Safety Partnership Plan and the Violence Against Women and Girls reports. These reports have been added to the lead officer's work plan to ensure thorough preparation and timely submission.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Details of motion provided to full council, 4 December 2024
- Appendix 2: Safer Streets 4 project delivery report